WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY – Founded December 19, 1857 NOVEMBER 1978

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The development study of the feasibility of a capital campaign for the building of a museum at the Barton Hills Power House site has been received and is being studied by the Board of Directors. Further information and conclusions will be given as decisions are made and actions taken.

One of the objects that I hope our Society can accomplish is to develop a closer relationship with other organizations in the city and county having objectives similar to ours.

The local historical societies in Chelsea, Dexter, Manchester, Milan, Salem, Saline and Ypsilanti are covered by the *Washtenaw Impressions* and those of the Ann Arbor Historic Commission and Cobblestone Farm should be added if they wish to be included. Reports of the activities of the Historical Society of Michigan with headquarters here in Ann Arbor could also be included. Each of these organizations have similar aims but different approaches and supplement one another. It is my feeling that closer co-operation would be beneficial to all. This relationship will be of even greater significance when the WCHS has a museum.

Leigh Anderson

EROTIC ENDPAPERS

One erotic book is known to have been published in 18th century America, Dr. John Dann of Clements Library, said. It is only known by the fact that printed sheets of it were found pasted in hymn or prayer books as endpapers, possibly by a publisher's helper who couldn't read.

'WE'LL BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS' TO BE THEME OF DECEMBER 17 WCHS MEETING AT POWERHOUSE

"We'll be home for Christmas" is the theme of the December WCHS meeting.

Museum Committee Chairman Hazel Proctor and Architect David Osler expect Barton Powerhouse to be closed in and heated in time for a "sneak preview" Sunday, December 17.

It definitely will not be a grand opening but a chance for members of the county and local historical societies to actually see the powerhouse and site of the proposed museum addition.

It will take considerable orchestrating, she said, but it looks as if that musical wish can come true. Chairs and tables will have to be taken out there, of course. Volunteer helpers will be needed. There will be no parking at the site. Buses will be used.

Alloa Anderson, wife of President Leigh Anderson, will present a program on "Christmas in the Kitchen". She is author of *Christmas Cookies*, her own 50-year collection of special holiday treats from several European countries published last year.

Tentative plans are that the powerhouse will be open from 2 to 5 p.m. The first and last hours will be "open house" with the program at 3 p.m.

While Mrs. Anderson plans to bake many kinds of cookies, WCHS members are asked to bring a dozen or so of their special holiday cookies to add to the festivities. She plans to make a cooky display by attaching a sample cooky of each kind made or donated to a four by six card with its name and maker.

SPEAKER TO DISCUSS EARLY POSTAL HISTORY BEFORE STAMPS, ZIP

Local postal history from the days before postage stamps up to zip codes will be the topic at the November 16 WCHS meeting at 8 p.m. in Liberty Hall at Great Lakes Federal Savings, Liberty at Division Streets, Ann Arbor.

Please note: The meeting is a week early because of the Thanksgiving holiday.

Dr. Frank Whitehouse, Jr., professor of microbiology in The University of Michigan medical school, is also a stamp collector who has "always been interested in local history". He combines these interests in his program which will include slides and displays from his collection.

A native of Ann Arbor, Dr. Whitehouse grew up in Ypsilanti, graduating from Roosevelt High School. His U-M studies were interrupted by World War II Army Service but he returned to graduate in 1949 and finish medical school in 1953. After internship at Blodgett Hospital in Grand Rapids, he returned here as a faculty member.

WCHS DUES RAISED

WCHS membership dues have been raised for 1979. Regular annual membership will be $5 individual and $9 for member and spouse. Senior citizens will be $4 and $7 respectively. Life membership will be $100 for individuals, $150 for member and spouse. Persons already members of local societies in the county may deduct $1.

TOPIC IS CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. and Mrs. William Jewell will talk about "How To Write Letters and Take Care of Your Correspondence" at the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County meeting at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, December 3, at Washtenaw Community College. A 1 p.m. help session is planned.

BOOK COLLECTING – A PERNICIOUS DISEASE

By Dr. John C. Dann
Director, William L. Clements Library
The University of Michigan

As any of you know who collect books or know a book collector, it is really a disease of a most pernicious sort.

It can wreak havoc with your family budget and for some reason it has primarily been a man's vice. At the same time it is most rewarding.

Collecting is older than the printed book. There were collections of tablets in Sumeria and the Alexandrian library in Egypt was one of the great libraries of world history. The Romans are generally credited with having the first private libraries.

For some reason there has always been some connection between thievery and wars and book collecting because this tended to "liberate" books which are then on the market to be collected. Roman generals would sack a city and take the libraries back to Rome.

Throughout history, wars and disruptions of private and public libraries put books on the market. I don't mean by that that most book collectors are thieves but there might be a little thievery at the source.

The earliest European printing was in 1440-1450. Multiple copies of books along with the Renaissance created in the 15th, 16th and especially in the 17th and 18th centuries vast quantities of books.

There is great interest in collecting the classics—the beautiful editions published in 15th century Italy, Everyman's Books and the Aldean Classics which you can still buy for under $100.

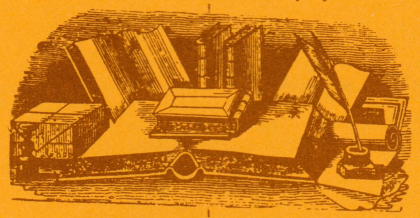
A friend picked up two Aldean press books of the early 1500's at an Ann Arbor book sale for under $3 each a few years back.

In France, Spain and other countries the press was strictly controlled by the crown. English kings didn't have that kind of control. In 18th century London, hundreds of printers were operating.

With the 18th century you begin to have middle class literacy and find lists of books in wills and estate inventories. You also have the first market in old and rare books. Sotheby's auction house in London is of late 18th century origin. By the early 19th century Christy's too was going strong.

Institutional library growth paralleled private growth. The British museum, in many ways the greatest museum in the world, is of 18th century origin.

After World War I, Britain exported books, art works and antiques. In books, at least, that has reversed in the last five to ten years. At the moment you can buy 17th and 18th century British books more cheaply here.



In the United States, book collecting as we know it is a 19th century phenomenon. Thomas Jefferson, the Adams family and George Washington had libraries and William Byrd of Westover is credited with having the first great American library, but these men were collecting for utilitarian purposes.

The idea of mapping out a field and then trying to acquire books in it develops gradually. You have to have a fairly literate population with money to buy books and leisure to get the knowledge needed to begin.

It also seems to develop when a society gains a sense of its own history and gets a native literature. It wasn't until the 1820's and 30's that you get Irving, Cooper and Hawthorne. At the same time, Revolutionary veterans in qualifying for pensions told stories of the war which, I'm sure, aroused interest as did La Fayette's visit in 1824-25.

Collecting begins and pretty soon a couple of collectors compare notes and get some inkling of what exists. History, literature and bibliography develop together.

In the 1840's you begin to have an occasional book auction. Earlier dealers sold books along with anything else they might have. The first known Philadelphia dealer advertised "books, whalebone, live geese feathers, Jesuit's bark, beaver hats and pickled sturgeon" all in one advertisement.

The earliest dealers were a very strange lot and a lot of them still are. It's one of the delightful things about working with them.

There's a wonderful little book by William Brotherhead published in 1891, *Forty Years Among The Booksellers of Philadelphia*. He describes a Mr. Apley as "dirty and ignorant". Of Hugh Hamel, "It is to be regretted that the latter years of his life were as much devoted to stimulants as to his business." Of John Wood, "He knew about as much about the character of his books as the books knew about him."

These quotes apply to a few people I've met in the trade in our own era.

Henry Stevens of Vermont in many ways established the field of Americana. A state historical society hired him to copy British records relating to America. He began to buy European books about America and sell them here. He singlehandedly helped create the library of John Carter Brown now at Brown University, one of the great libraries, similar to Clements but older and greater in the discovery field.

Stevens helped create the library of James Lenox which is the heart of the Americana section of the New York Public Library. The Stevens firm also helped

create Mr. Clements collection and it is still operating.

Regular book auctions began in the United States in the late 19th century. By the early 20th century, the Anderson gallery began, an ancestor of the present Sotheby Parke-Bernet gallery.

They have regular sales, occasionally with manuscript materials. Now Christy's has opened in New York. Charles Hamilton has periodic autograph sales. There is Swans and five or ten lesser houses in New York and a few elsewhere.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, second hand bookstores cropped up in major urban areas, also a different sort of market—limited editions, signed copies and some noted sets. There is a signed set of Thoreau in which they cut up Thoreau manuscripts and bound a page in each volume.

There are also "grangerized" volumes which were very popular with wealthy 19th century collectors. You take your favorite book, Dickens for example, put in a page, then mount a letter of Dickens, then a watercolor of a town that's represented. Most older libraries such as ours have one or two copies still on the shelf.

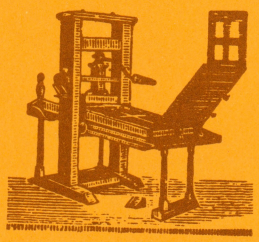
In many ways 1900-1929 is the golden age of American collecting, primarily because of the vast industrial wealth in the country and little or no income tax.

When you've made your ten million dollars in coke or steel you want to become respectable quick. One way is not only to buy a beautiful house but also to have a magnificent library and act as if you've read one or two of the books.

At the same time, in Europe there was considerable economic hardship. Great estates were broken up by death of sons in World War I and high estate taxes. From 1918-1925 tremenduous amounts of material were shipped out of England and purchased at ever more dizzying prices in New York.

Art museums got most of their Gainsboroughs and Whistlers then. The Weidner family of Philadelphia spent vast amounts on the library they gave to Harvard in memory of a family member who went down on the Titanic.

J.P. Morgan went into collecting in a big way. When you go to New York, I strongly advise you to see the Morgan library—it's one of the most beautiful places in the United States.



The Huntington library in California is the creation of a nephew of a railroad magnate who made his money in street cars and collected on a princely scale. Clements is in the same tradition though on a much smaller scale. I don't know that Clements ever had a million dollar income in a single year but I'm sure he spent $15 to $18 million on his books over 20 years. Clements got things you could never get again.

About the same time, Goodspeeds began buying local materials in New England. This sort of thing occasionally produces fascinating rarities, even in Ann Arbor.

If you could find a pamphlet printed in Ann Arbor in 1828 it would be just as scarce as a book printed in Boston in 1662. It was no easier to print in Ann Arbor then than in 1662 in Boston.

The depression, income taxes and changes in lifestyle of the very rich put an end to vast expenditures on books.

Another great factor is microfilming. When Clements established his library in 1923 the only copy of a book of 1683 would be an original. Today University Microfilm can sell you a copy for $15.

There was some resurgence of institutional collecting in the 1950's and 60's with multiplication of colleges and universities but this is pretty much over.

It makes very good sense for a historical society to build up a good reference collection. You can reprint four or five key local histories but there are hundreds of other items not worthy of reprint that you still want in a reference library on the county. The market is going up and up in the field.

There are not many wealthy collectors today but there are more smaller, smarter collectors who specialize. You can build a good library in a special field on a relatively limited budget.

The average man has more leisure and more wealth. There is growth in book fairs and flea markets—five or ten sales a year in Ann Arbor and hundreds within 50 miles. This didn't exist to this extent just 10 or 15 years ago.

What is collectible? Vast amounts of books are available, something for everybody. Tastes do change. In the 1920's there was great interest in Victorian literature. It subsided but may be coming back again. Since we now care about the fire hall in Ann Arbor, we may begin to care about the novelists of the period too.

Generally the market continues to rise but any bookdealer will advise caution in buying as investment. You have to hold things a long time.

There are such things as common rarities to watch out for. If you found the Federalist Papers in your attic in the original two volume edition you might think you could retire or endow a college. In intellectual thoughts in American history it's priceless, but in monetary terms the best copies go for no more than $1,500. It's not terribly scarce. Again a book may exist in only one copy and nobody wants it. People have to want a book for it to be valuable. Reprints also affect the market.

Today the closing of a lot of small colleges, many denominational, is enlivening the book market. On their shelves can be magnificent books like the "1828 Ann Arbor Pamphlet", rarities

which nobody's read since a pious minister gave it in 1835. We're buying such things at Clements. This market will continue for five or ten years until economic survival of the fittest has occurred.

An increasing number of dealers see what they can get for a book, resulting in far more bargaining. Some dealers have different prices for different people.

What are possible fields of collecting? History of a subject, type collecting such as 19th century American novels, presentation copies signed by the author, types of bindings, fore edge paintings, first editions, miniatures, fine plates and imprints.

To collect the most important thing is contact with books. Visit stores, sales, library duplicate shelves. Get mailing lists of dealers to get a sense of prices. Concentrate quickly. You can rapidly become an expert in your field and know more than dealers do. Every dealer has his gaps and that is what the stories of collecting are made of.

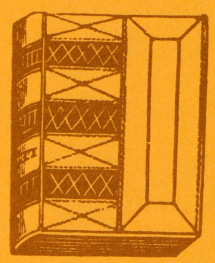
A Texas autograph dealer listed James Wilkerson letters for $5 to $15 each. He misread the name and we got letters which should have sold for $50 to $100 each. Wilkinson was involved in the Burr conspiracy and commander of Detroit in the 1790's.

I know someone who picked up a letter at a Sotheby sale in the last five years for two pounds. Described only as "American manuscript" it turned out to be an eyewitness letter of a British soldier in the Battle of Bunker Hill.

About five years ago I went into a strange shop in Highland Park. It had stuff that might have come out of 1930's movie houses and completely out of context, an old leather tome on a shelf. By opening one page I could see it was *very old.* For $5 I got a book printed in Paris in 1532, beat up but important in terms of printing, probably worth hundreds.

This summer a dealer quoted two handwritten maps of Mackinac and the St. Lawrence River at $50 for both. The one is the best map of Mackinac that exists. Done about 1842-44 it shows every property line, every building. We know exactly the way the forts were. The other is of an engagement in the War of 1812. The price of each was about one percent of market value.

This dealer knows his business and is not cheap on printed stuff, but the manuscript maps threw him.



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Printing and Production: Courtesy of Great Lakes Federal Savings and Drury, Lacy, Inc.

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

Chelsea Historical Society — 8 p.m. second Monday of month at McKune Memorial Library.

Dexter Historical Society — Christmas bazaar, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, December 2, at museum. Crafts, baked goods and other homemade items for sale. Christmas display to feature tree with antique toys around it.

Manchester Historical Society — 8 p.m. fourth Monday of month at Methodist Church.

Milan Historical Society — 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday of month at Milan Community House.

Salem Historical Society — Christmas bazaar, 9 a.m.—9 p.m. December 9 at township hall, featuring crafts for sale, Santa, refreshments.

Saline Historical Society — 8 p.m. third Tuesday of month at Saline High School library. Program on putting garden to bed, second in series on restoring older homes.

Ypsilanti Historical Society — 3-5 p.m. Sunday, November 19, at the museum, 220 North Huron Street. Mrs. Ethel Royce will talk about her button collection started in 1941.

FARLEY GIFTS RECEIVED

Wilhelmina Farley has given WCHS a varied collection of items including three old dolls, Christmas ornaments, handmade clothing, a turn-of-the-century sewing machine, a trunk, and other items not yet catalogued.

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

8:00 p.m. THURSDAY

NOVEMBER 16, 1978

Liberty Hall
Great Lakes Federal Savings
Liberty at Division

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